# Renewal | History ~ Newburyport

historynewburyport.com/renewal/

## Renewal

Newburyport: A story of repeated success, decline, recovery and renewal.

*John W. Cushing built at Newburyport in 1853, 671 tons, The Snow Collection, The Museum of Old Newbury*

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Newburyport has had a repeated history of great success, decline, recovery and renewal. This website, History ~ Newburyport, was created at the beginning of the global COVID-19 pandemic, and at that time I thought it would be good to be reminded of what an incredibly resilient city Newburyport has been over the centuries - an embodiment of courage, strength and hope, re-imagination, adaption and perseverance.

*1851 Map showing both the shipping wharves, the railroad, and the mills – a thriving community*

Map of the Fire of 1811
Courtesy of the Newburyport Public Library Archival Center

Newburyport was incorporated in 1764, it was a prosperous shipping port with illustrious visitors such as George Washington, John Quincy Adams, Thomas Jefferson, James Monroe and Marquis de Lafayette.

*Map of the Fire of 1811, courtesy of the Newburyport Public Library Archival Center*

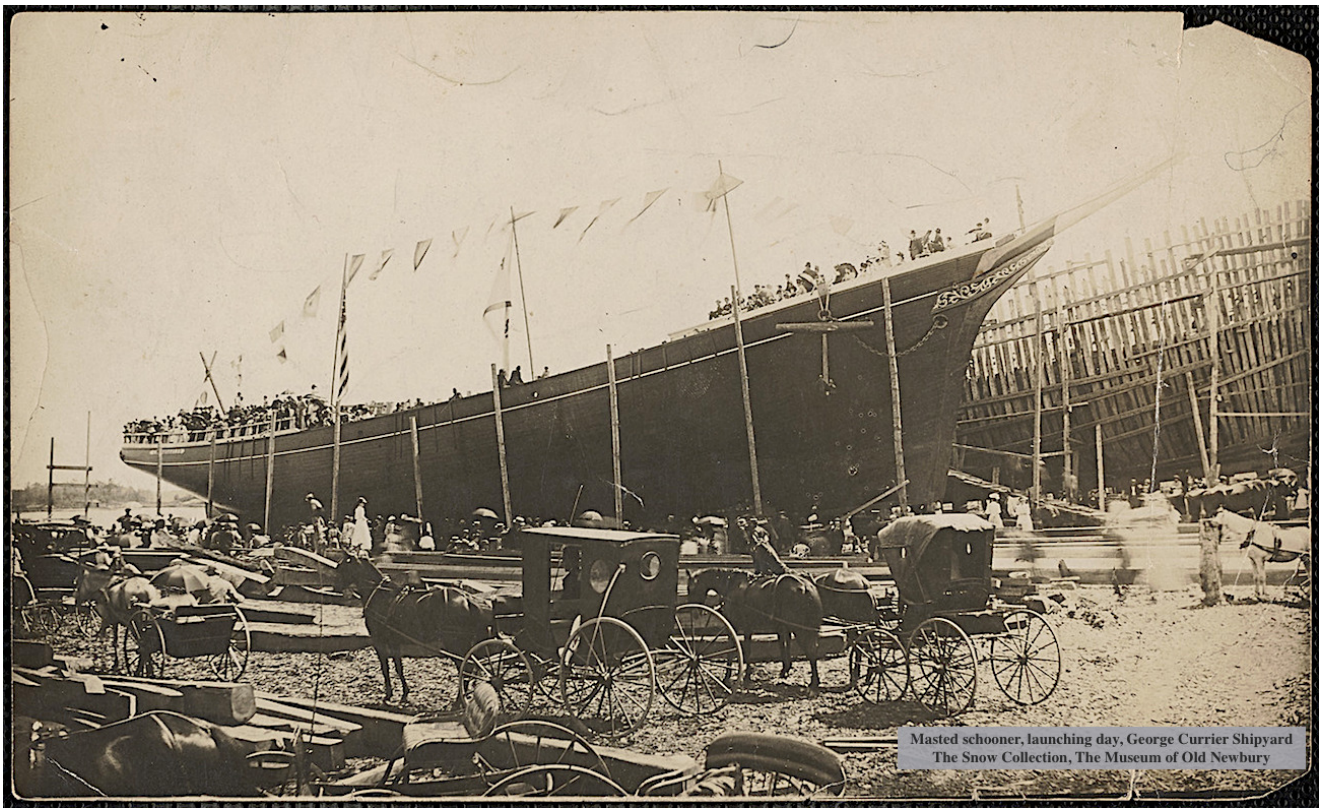
First the 1807 Embargo Act and then the great fire of 1811, which destroyed over 16 acres of downtown Newburyport, devastated the town. The town was rebuilt and all structures over ten feet high were to be made of brick or stone - the downtown Newburyport that exists today.

*Detail – State Street looking towards Market Square, ca. 1890 – 1899. The Snow Collection, The Museum of Old Newbury*

## Change Continued

In the 1800s ship building continued to flourish and then declined when steam boats came along and the harbor was too small. And many different industries developed and the mills were created, and then Newburyport's manufacturing suffered a long slow stagnation.

By the mid to late 1950s Massachusetts was trying to deal with the fading of the post-war economic boom, striking unions, rusting industrial complexes and fleeing manufacturers taking jobs with them as they left for friendlier business environments. And in Newburyport, the economy and historic downtown center was crumbling.




*Masted schooner, launching day, George **Currier Shipyard**, The Snow Collection, The Museum of Old Newbury*

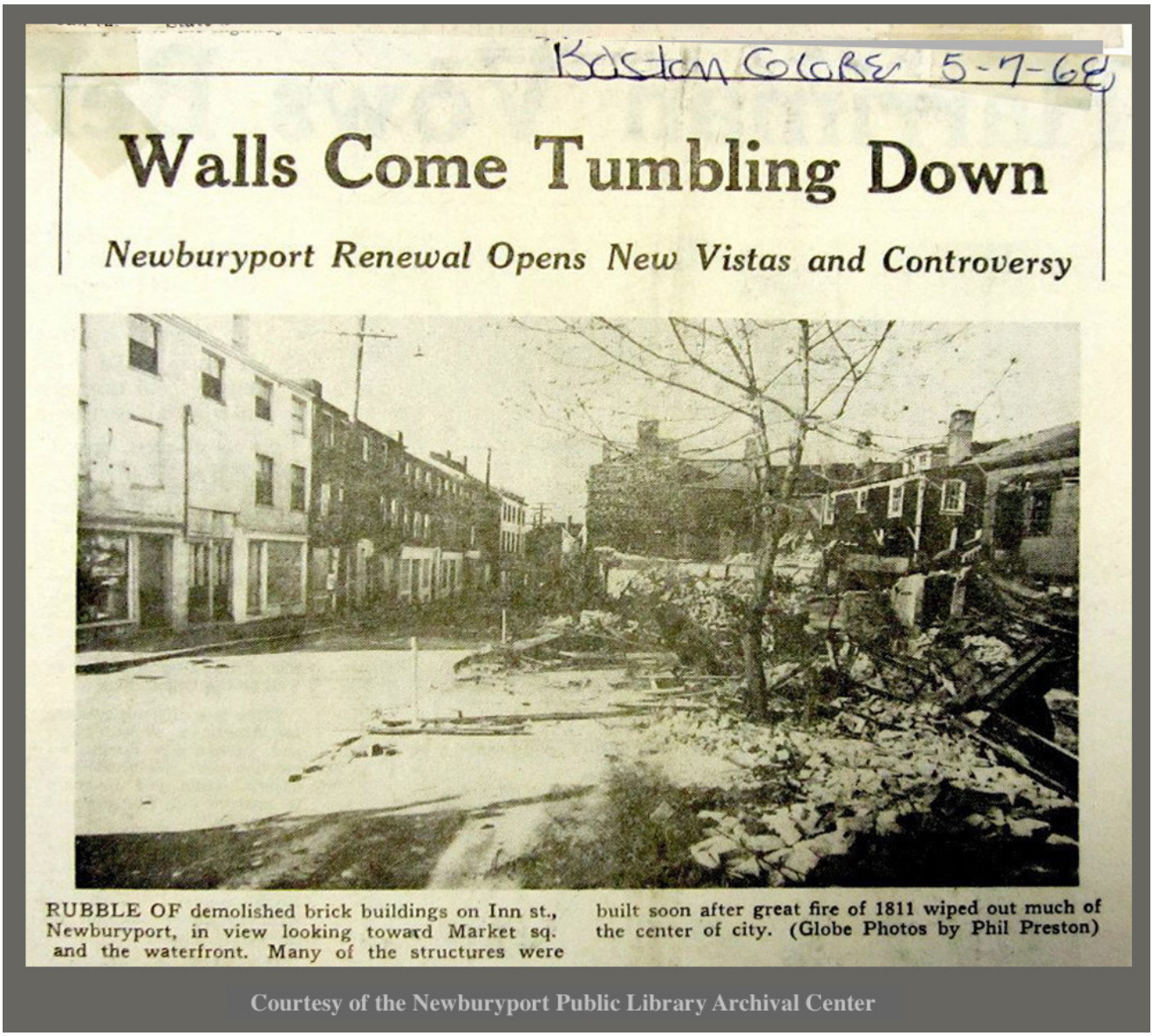
*Burley and Stevens **Shoe Factory**, 1909, The Snow Collection, The Museum of Old Newbury*

***<u>The Comb Factory</u>***, *courtesy of the Newburyport Public Library Archival Center*

**Aerial shot of the demolition of downtown Newburyport from the video "A Measure of Change"**

Al Zabriskie (mayor 1960-1963) had been elected mayor promising, "Action and progress, rather than stagnation." His plan, among other things, included the urban renewal of the downtown Newburyport. By 1960 most of the buildings along lower State Street were already boarded up. Some local merchants were holding their own, but many businesses did not survive. The model for Urban Renewal, which was shown around 1964, was to tear down almost the entire historic downtown and replace it with a strip mall and parking lots.

*Aerial shot of the demolition of downtown Newburyport from the video "A Measure of Change"*



Boston Globe 5-7-68

# Walls Come Tumbling Down

*Newburyport Renewal Opens New Vistas and Controversy*

RUBBLE OF demolished brick buildings on Inn st., Newburyport, in view looking toward Market sq. and the waterfront. Many of the structures were built soon after great fire of 1811 wiped out much of the center of city. (Globe Photos by Phil Preston)

Courtesy of the Newburyport Public Library Archival Center

A group formed under the Historical Society of Old Newbury (the HIST) brought forward the idea of restoring the buildings in the downtown historic district instead of tearing everything down. Nationally renowned cardiologist Dr. Robert Wilkins, Ruth, and Edmond Burke, and other residents approached the city's elected officials about not losing the heritage of Newburyport's historic downtown.

*Boston Globe, May 7, 1968, courtesy of the Newburyport Public Library Archival Center*
George Lawler (mayor 1964-1967) was mayor when the delegation from the HIST led by banker John "Hack" Pramberg, architect Edmond Burke and Dr. Wilkins paid a visit, in 1968 the restoration of downtown Newburyport would go forward under mayor Byron Matthews (mayor 1968-1978).

The Historical Society of Old Newbury's grassroots committee was successful in saving the historic integrity of the downtown area. And since that time Newburyport has grown and flourished, its downtown is a national example of how historic preservation can save a

community from blight and neglect.

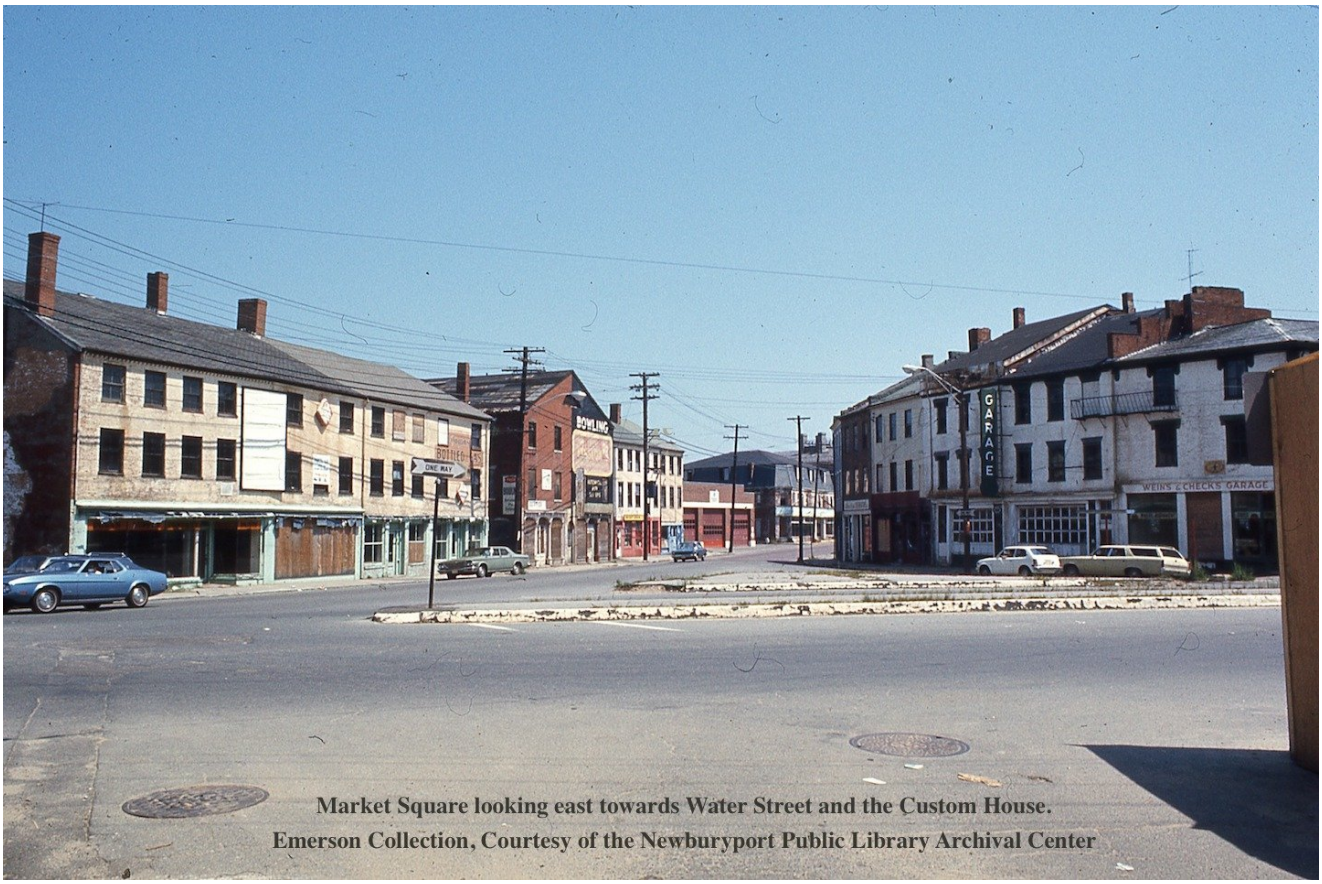
*Video about Newburyport's Urban Renewal, "A Measure of Change"*

## Urban Renewal

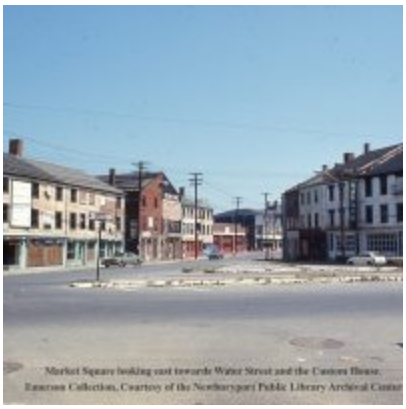
Newburyport was saved from blight and neglect through the preservation and restoration of its historic downtown instead of wholesale demolition in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Market Square looking east towards Water Street and the Custom House.
Emerson Collection, Courtesy of the Newburyport Public Library Archival Center

Market Square, East Row--Atlantic Coast Distributors and Wein & Checks Garage.
Emerson Collection, Courtesy of the Newburyport Public Library Archival Center




Market Square looking east towards Water Street and the Custom House.
Emerson Collection, Courtesy of the Newburyport Public Library Archival Center




*Emerson Collection, Courtesy of the Newburyport Public Library Archival Center*

Former mayor Bossy Gillis' gas station on Merrimack Street. The station was razed during urban renewal.
Bill Lane Collection, Courtesy of the Newburyport Public Library Archival Center

Junk yard behind the Custom House, 1968
Bill Lane Collection, Courtesy of the Newburyport Public Library Archival Center

L. L. Peavey's hardware store in Market Square.
Bill Lane Collection, Courtesy of the Newburyport Public Library Archival Center

The junkyard behind the Custom House, 1968
Bill Lane Collection, Courtesy of the Newburyport Public Library Archival Center

*Bill Lane Collection, Courtesy of the Newburyport Public Library Archival Center*

Market Square 2019
Courtesy of Mary Baker Eaton

Market Square 2019
Courtesy of Mary Baker Eaton

State Street, Downtown Newburyport 2019
Courtesy of Mary Baker Eaton

Inn Street today, courtesy of Mary Baker Eaton

Inn Street today, courtesy of Mary Baker Eaton

*Downtown Newburyport, Massachusetts after the restoration and preservation of the 1970s*

## References


History from an interview with George Lawler in the Daily News of Newburyport, April 15, 2007, by Angeljean Chiaramida: https://www.newburyportnews.com/news/local_news/port-s-revival-hinged-on-a-few-crucial-actions/article_7e7e1119-2d26-5770-9177-76d4ac0bfb62.html

A look back at the start of Newburyport's revival, by Bill Plante, the Daily News of Newburyport, July 29, 2017: https://www.newburyportnews.com/opinion/columns/a-look-back-at-start-of-newburyports-revival/article_5a7184df-d246-52ea-bb5b-1d5f51899f26.html

Ghlee Woodworth, the Clipper Heritage Trail, Newburyport resident, and famed Williamsburg, Va. architect William Graves Perry who came up with another model based on restoring downtowns historic buildings:
**http://www.clipperheritagetrail.com/tour_downalongandridge.php**

The history of the Historical Society of Old Newbury, which is now called the Museum of Old Newbury, can be found here: **https://www.newburyhistory.org/museum-history**

98 High Street, the Cushing House, from the Newburyport Historic Property Surveys can be found here:
**https://www.cityofnewburyport.com/sites/g/files/vyhlif7106/f/file/file/98_high_street_0.pdf**

History of the Cushing House:
**https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cushing_House_Museum_and_Garden**

**More Stories from History ~ Newburyport**

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Downtown Newburyport

Check Out The Interactive History Map

More information about Newburyport and its history can be found on the interactive history map, "**Newburyport – Keeping the Story Alive**."

Solve The Renewal Puzzle

Press the icon to play the puzzle on a full screen or **tap here to expand the image.**